

Government weathermen have officially labeled the present dry spell as a “mild drouth.” The basis of their analysis is the seven year drouth that wrecked the country in the 1950s. This comparison is closely in line with the manufacturers of birthday candles holding a meeting with the manufacturers of napalm flame throwers to discuss firepower. No 16 calamities that have ever struck ranchdom should be compared to those seven dreadful years. I’m not sure That Sherman’s march to the sea wouldn’t be considered mild compared to that period.

Several symptoms of mild drouth are becoming apparent as the winter progresses. Hearing that San Angelo is burning their lake beds gives a fair indication that the moisture pattern has been altered. I know if I heard that Lake Michigan was on fire, I’d suspect that the humidity was low in Chicago. Nearly any time you hear that a river or a lake is burning up you can bet that the area is experiencing some dryness.

Feed trucks running day and night is another good sign that the weather had changed for the worse. Hombres leaving the Post Office muttering to themselves is also a clue that subnormal rainfall is prevalent. Other things like the wind whipping an old cow around in the breeze proves that a mild drouth is indeed underway.

Late spring will be the time to determine the exact proportions of the drouth. Once my people start taking their children swimming, you can tell precisely how desperate times have become.

You see under normal conditions, Shortgrass picnics are held on the shallow parts of the river. But let things get tough, and more and more, you’ll see these gatherings being held near spots having the most treacherous bottom and the slickest banks.

As my contemporaries can attest, in the glorious years of the 1930s the campsite near deep water holes abounded in family reunions and church picnics. Though the rivers then had miles of waterfront open to the public, the most popular grounds were close to the deepest water.

Customs were different. Swimming lessons for us kids were unknown. People wouldn’t have come to lifesaving classes if you’d handed out free home brew at the door of the classroom. I remember seeing one set of warning buoys on one swimming hole, but when a partner of mine examined the deal, he discovered they’d been placed on the wrong side of a deep jump off.

I asked my mother the other day why, every time we went to the river, we camped at a place known as the bottomless hole. It seemed strange that of all the ranchers we knew who had river property, this deep blue hole was the favorite.

For a short time, she acted sort of peculiar about the question. She must have been thinking about the good old days or maybe how much trouble it was to find the money to buy groceries in those days. Finally, she said that the bottomless hole was a good place to camp because the mosquitos weren’t so bad on high bluffs.

I dropped the subject. Mothers, you know, don’t like to be reminded that at one time they had high hopes for their prodigies. Turning out to be a sheep and cow herder isn’t a disgrace, but it sure is a long way around to get your name in the “Who’s Who” lineup. Women take an awfully materialistic view of non-profit occupations.

Don’t worry about what kind of drouth we are having. Until it rains, it won’t matter what the meteorologists say. Drouths are a lot like hair shirts. Regardless of the size, they never do feel right.